

# **So Your Library is a Museum: Working with Art & History Collections**

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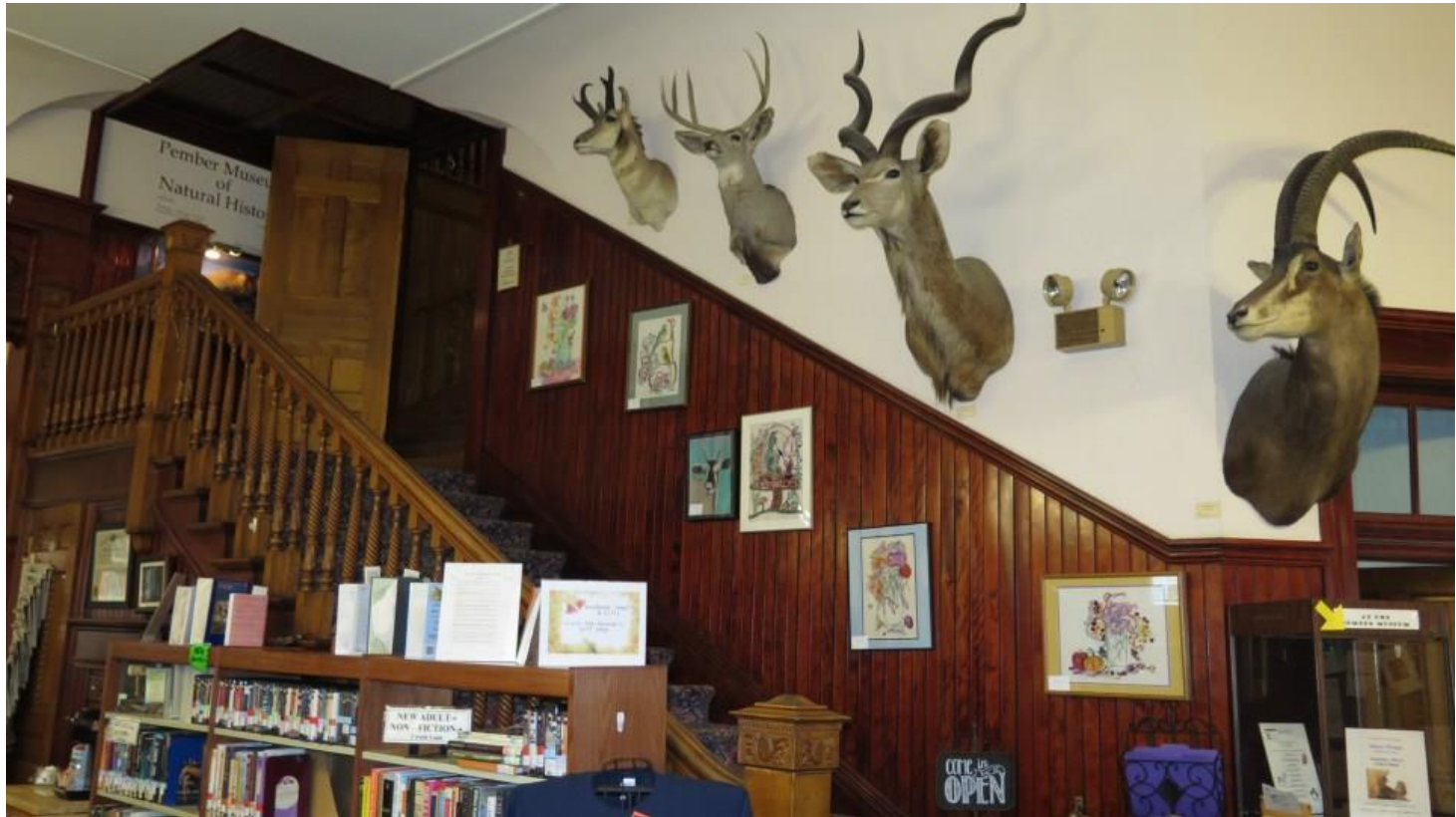
# Agenda

- Why do I have it?
- What do I have?
- What do I do with it?

Learning Goal: a basic understanding of working with museum collections.



# Why do I have this stuff?



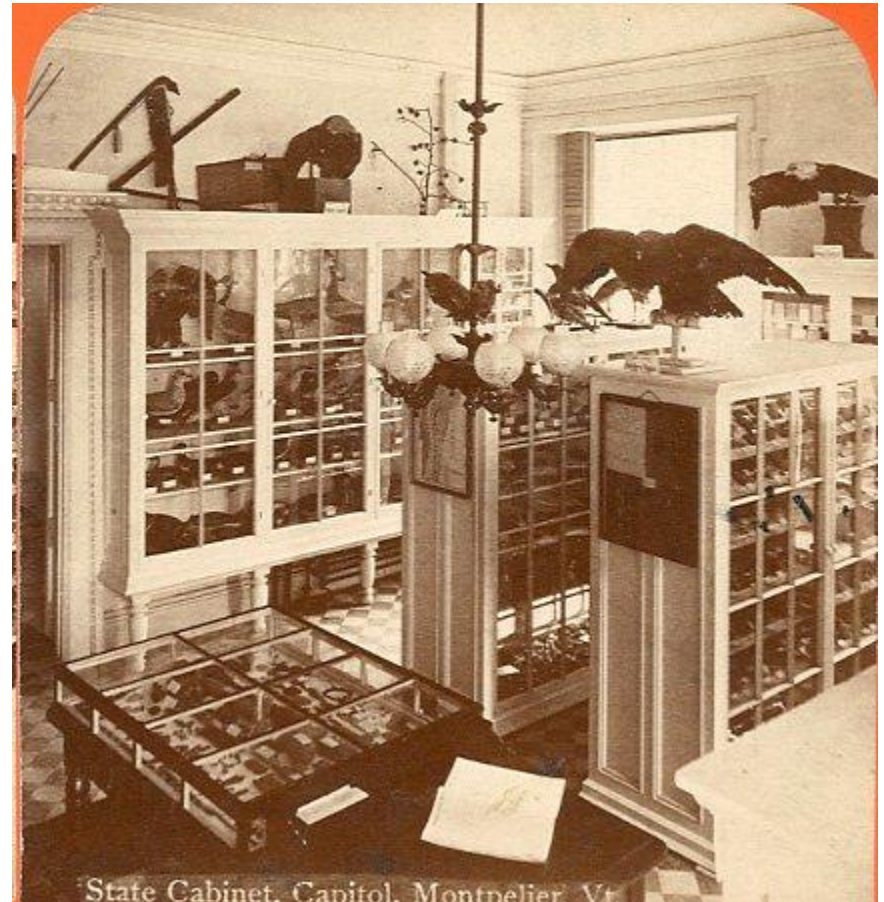
Pember Museum & Library, Granville, NY

# Why do I have this stuff?

## History of museums & libraries are intertwined

- Cabinets of Curiosity
- 19<sup>th</sup> Century Philanthropy & Knowledge Sharing
- American Exceptionalism

Public libraries grew, but no public museum system in U.S.



# Why do I have this stuff?

## Donor intent

- Public giving & philanthropy
- Libraries as community stewards
- Educating your community about the world
- Only public institution in town



“We wanted to keep it local because so many people love it. Our first thought was for the new library that Columbus is trying to build,” – from *Library Turns Down Elephant Head*, Columbus Telegram, 2014

# Why do I have this stuff?

*Shelburne Town Library- Gift Acceptance Policy*

## **Tangible Personal Property:**

In general, gifts of art objects, furniture, equipment, and other tangible objects shall be of use to the Town or of interest to the community, of a professional quality, and in good condition. As with all gifts, tangible personal property will only be accepted with the donor's full agreement that the Town has the right to handle or dispose of the gift in the best interests of the Town. Because of the Town's limited display and storage areas, potential donors of art & decorative objects are requested to discuss any possible gifts with the Town Manager. No gifts requiring extensive, regular care or conservation will be accepted. Donors will be required to pay for an appraisal of the property before it will be accepted in order that the Town can accurately record the gift in its books.



# What Do I Have?



St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, St. Johnsbury, VT

# What Do I Have?

## Hiding in plain sight

- Art (paintings, sculpture, framed works)
- Natural History (taxidermy, specimens)
- History/Material Culture (local history, Native American, furniture)
- Archival (photos, documents, printed works)
- Architecture (interior finishes, features, building materials)



# What Do I Have?

## Quick Collections Assessment

- What types of objects/property do you have that aren't circulating materials or office/admin items?
  - Unique
  - Have historic value
  - Have artistic value
  - Have community value
- Where are these objects located?
- Where did these objects come from?

# What Do I Do With It?



Hitchcock Museum & Library, Westfield, VT

# What Do I Do With It?

## Should I keep it?

- Does it fit within your mission?
- Do you have the resources (namely money & space) for it?
- What are the community value & ties
- Would it be better somewhere else?
- Are there any donor restrictions that came with it?



Goodrich Library, Newport, VT

# What Do I Do With It?

## Inventory & Cataloging

- Inventory is a list, Catalog is details.
- You can utilize current library cataloging system or separate museum system.
- What do you need to know about what you have to be able to make decisions?



Bixby Library, Vergennes, VT

# What Do I Do With It?

## Preservation Basics

- Good Environment
  - Agents of Deterioration
- Be Supportive (gravity always wins)
- Don't touch....usually



Craftsbury Public Library, Craftsbury, VT

# What Do I Do With It?



## Physical Forces

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Poor handling, accidents

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Abrasion, breakages, losses



## Thieves, Vandals

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Poor security, breach of rules

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Total/partial loss,  
defacement, loss in value



## Fire

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Arson, negligence,  
poor maintenance

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Smoke, discolouration, loss



## Water

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Flood, rain, leaks,  
fire suppression

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Loss of media, mould,  
physical damage



## Pests

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Poor housekeeping

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Physical damage or loss of  
material, contamination



## Contaminants

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Pollution, poor housekeeping  
Inherently unstable materials

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Chemical changes, dirt,  
transfer of contaminants



## Radiation/Light

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Daylight, no UV filters

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Accelerated degradation,  
embrittlement, fading



## Incorrect Temperature

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Unsuitable environments,  
plant failure

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Accelerated degradation,  
embrittlement, softening



## Incorrect Relative Humidity

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Unsuitable environments,  
plant failure

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Mould, embrittlement,  
accelerated degradation



## Dissociation

### POSSIBLE CAUSES

Poor labelling, misplacing items

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Loss of information,  
difficulty locating items,  
loss of coherence of object(s)  
or collections



# What Do I Do With It?

## Preservation Basics

- Good Environment
  - Agents of Deterioration
- Be Supportive (gravity always wins)
- Don't touch....usually



Craftsbury Public Library, Craftsbury, VT

# What Do I Do With It?

## Gloves or No Gloves?

- How susceptible is the item to the chemicals on your hands?
- Are there hazards on the items to you?
- Does wearing gloves inhibit your ability to safely handle the item?



# What Do I Do With It?

## Safety & Security

- Perceived Value vs. Real Value
- Identifying easy targets
- Risk management & mitigation

*What was taken was described as a spearhead, an obsidian spear head. When the police came, and asked us about it, we didn't know, we had no photograph, no accurate description.*

# What Do I Do With It?

## Collections of Concern

### Native American

- NAGPRA

### Human Remains

- Native American
- Medical



Bixby Library, Vergennes, VT

# What Do I Do With It?

## Collections of Concern

### Taxidermy

- Arsenic & other chemicals
- Wildlife laws
- Housekeeping terrors
  - attract pests & dust



Haskell Free Library, Derby Line, VT



# What Do I Do With It?

## Collections of Concern

### Ammunition, Firearms, & Weapons

- Safety concerns
- Theft concerns



“Old grenade found in storage closes Elkhorn Valley museum”

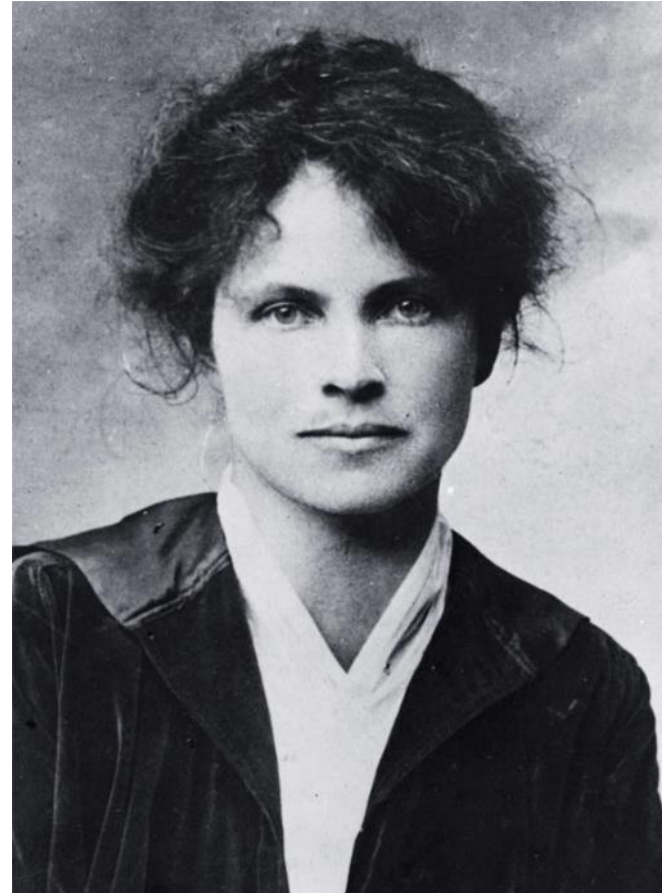


# What Do I Do With It?

## Collections of Concern

### Dark Histories

- Racist or troubling items
- Racist or troubling donors/people



# What Do I Do With It?

## Use it to your advantage

- Exhibits & Presentations
- Memory Prompts/community history
  - Storytelling
  - Memory Café
  - Social Media



# What Do I Do With It?



Springfield Art & Historical Society and Library  
Exhibit on railroad history



Middlebury College Special Collections  
Exhibit on endpapers

# What Do I Do With It?



BE THE FIRST TO SEE [OBJECT A601149](#) ONLINE



Blake Memorial Library, Corinth  
Brooks Memorial Library, Brattleboro  
Science Museum Group (UK)

[sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/.../culpeper-microscope-body-and-stand-english-mid-17-culp...](http://sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/.../culpeper-microscope-body-and-stand-english-mid-17-culp...)



# What Do I Do With It?

## Use it to your advantage

- Kids/Student Programs
  - Writing
  - Using Primary Sources
- Art Programs
  - Paint n Sip
  - Drawing classes
  - Poetry/writing prompts



Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, VT

# What Do I Do With It?



Tweets

Pres. Coolidge

President Calvin Coolidge

@coolcal





# What Do I Do With It?



# What Do I Do With It?

## Use it to your advantage

### Outside the Box!

- Library taxidermy loan program
- Puzzles and games
- Scavenger hunts
- Grab a friend: partnership programs



Alaska Resources Library, Anchorage, AK

# What Do I Do With It?

**Eye Spy: Can you find these details?** (hint, they are along Main Street between Dan & Whit's and the blue house at the entrance to town).



Number 1



Number 2



Number 4

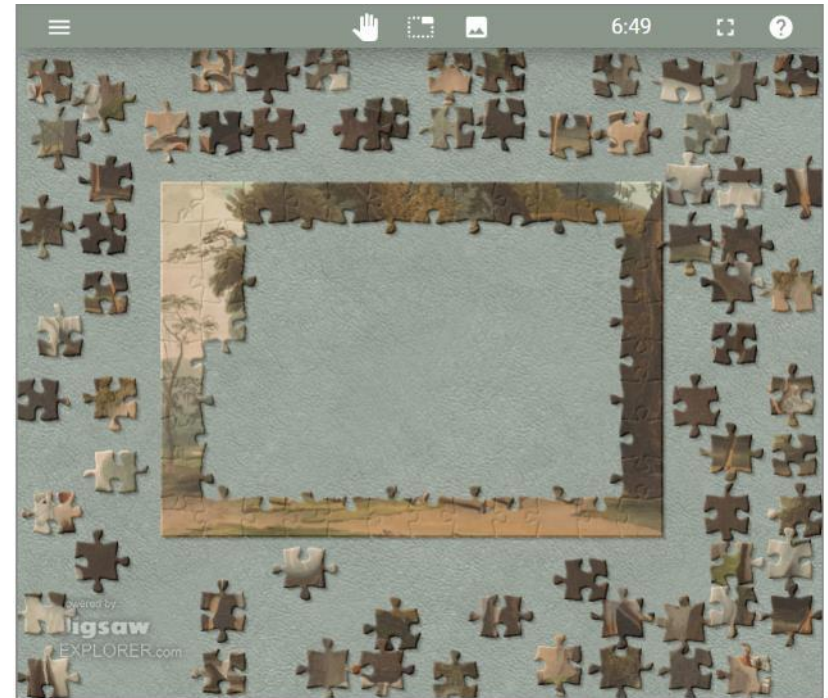


Number 5



Number 3

I Spy, page 1  
Norwich Historical Society





# Wrap-Up

- A little attention goes a long way
- Make collections work for you
- Work Together



Sheldon Library ca. 1990s

# Questions?

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